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"Bed Tax" Futures Task Force Work Underway

The five-month review of the past and planning for the future of Montana's "bed tax" began at an all day meeting in the State Capitol Building in Helena May 18.

TAC Chair Lisa Perry of Billings opened the meeting by directing the task force to serve as a "think tank" for the advisory council. She asked them to focus their efforts on "learning where we have been (with the bed tax) and creating suggestions for where we should be going." The goal, said Perry, is for TAC, Travel Montana, its tourism partners, and the Racicot Administration to enter the 1999 Legislature with a pro-active program for "bed tax" utilization. The task force "bed tax" recommendations will be presented at TAC's October meeting. A TAC "bed tax" proposal will be sent on to Governor Racicot for consideration prior to the legislative session.

Throughout the day-long meeting, the task force heard from representatives of agencies and organizations that currently receive "bed tax" revenues. Each explained how their portion of the "bed tax" was utilized and they responded to questions from task force members about their operations, alternative funding sources and new ideas for "bed tax" use. Below is the current "bed tax" allocation formula.

As part of the task force operations, a list of issues to be explored during the five-month review was created. These issues generally ask whether it is in Montana's best interest to use the "bed tax" for such things as:

- infrastructure projects, both tourism-related and non-tourism?
- tourism-related or general operations of cities, counties and CVBs?
- convention/events solicitations?
- conservation easements?
- tourism promotion and how much?

Other issues involve adjustments to the current allocation formula to provide greater funding or to reduce or eliminate funding; changing the "bed tax" rate or doing away with the "bed tax" altogether.

Bed Tax Allocation

• **Montana Heritage Commission** (Virginia City)	$400,000/yr for 4 years
• **State Parks Operations/Maintenance**	6.5%
• **Department of Revenue**	3.0%
• **University System** (tourism research)	2.5%;
• **Historical Society** (historic sites and signage)	1.0%
• **Department of Commerce** (Regions/CVBs, Travel Montana) (Regions/CVBs receive 25%) (Travel Montana receives 75%)	87.0%

The task force, chaired by TAC vice-chair Carl Kochman of Great Falls, is made up of 15 members from a variety of Montana interest groups. Future task force meetings are planned for June 29, in the Butte area; August 11, Billings; and September 18 in Helena. Each of these meetings will offer opportunities for public comment. There will be more information on the task force work and the public meetings in future newsletters.

"Bed Tax" Funds Presented For ZooMontana and Choteau Projects

Lt. Governor Judy Martz presented $37,000 to ZooMontana Director Dr. Bill Torgerson on Friday, June 29. The "bed tax" financed Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP) grant will assist the Billings attraction in developing the initial phase of its Plains Habitat Display. The display is the latest development at the 70-acre facility which exhibits animal species and heritage displays from the world's northern temperate latitudes.

During the TAC meeting in Choteau, June 1-2, Travel Montana Director Matthew Cohn delivered $24,699 in TIIP funds to officials of the Old Trail Museum. This grant will help the museum finish a number of exhibits, fix two leaky roofs, weatherize three buildings and install a security system. The Old Trail Museum interprets the history of the Rocky Mountain Front region along with the area's rich dinosaur fossil resources.

These two grants are part of a $200,000 "bed tax" investment awarded to five Montana projects during 1997.

Marketing Campaigns Active; Generating Inquiries

Montana's "warm season" print, TV and internet banner ads have been before the public since January. Consumer Marketing Manager Suzanne Elfstrom reports that as of the end of April, total inquiries attributed to this marketing mix were almost 100,000 more than 1997's volume: from 251,258 to 347,377.

In June, Travel Montana will put Montana's weekend getaway opportunities promotion back to work in Alberta. The "Worthington" ads, featuring a fictitious Alberta couple who just love to sneak away to Montana, will run on Alberta radio, newspaper & internet banner ads June 15-July 30.

Now that summer is almost upon us, the marketing crew is at work on new creative for downhill ski magazine and TV ads; a new 1998-99 snowmobile campaign is also being created.

1998-99 CTAP Applications Now Being Accepted

Montana Communities or Indian Reservations interested in assessing their tourism potential can now apply for involvement in Montana's 1998-99 Community Tourism Assessment Program (CTAP). Applications are available from Travel Montana.

The deadline for applying for the 8-month assessment process is August 1. For more information contact Travel Montana's Mary Pipal, 444-2654.

There is a CTAP video available for those interested in seeing and hearing about the experience of six Montana communities which have gone through the process. The video is available for $14.95 from MSU Publications, 994-3273.

New Montana Highway Maps Available

There is a new look to the 1 million Montana Highway Maps printed for the 1998-99 travel year. The map still contains great information about the six tourism regions' travel highlights.

There are still great photos and a detailed map of Montana. The new look comes not only with the cover photo — hikers in the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains — but, most significantly, the map is folded differently: it is now a basic fold map, roughly 4x9, that fits perfectly in a vehicle's glove box. The new map is now available for distribution.

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided to disabled persons on request.

An International Award Winner: Montana's Strategic Plan for Tourism

This month Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research Director Norma Nickerson will receive a prestigious marketing award from the international Travel and Tourism Research Association. Norma will receive the "Professional Category Award" for ITRR's work on Montana's Five Year Strategic Plan for Travel and Tourism: 1998-2002. When Norma announced the award at a May meeting in Helena, she credited all those involved in the 2 year development of the plan which included input sessions at the annual Governor's Conference and public meetings across the state.

Congratulations to Norma and the ITRR staff as well as everyone in Montana's travel industry.

Travel Montana Calendar

June	
1-2	TAC Meeting, Choteau
5-10	Missoula Area Media Tour
11-17	Geysers to Glaciers Media Tour
12-15	Showbiz West, L.A.
16	MTRI Research Focus Team, 10 a.m., location TBA
23	MTRI Electronic Media Focus Team, 10:00 am, Commerce Building, Helena
29	Bed Tax Futures Task Force Mtg, Butte area

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